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2010 LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

SEN. JOE ZAKAS: OTHER KEY ISSUES FROM THE 2010 GENERAL ASSEMBLY

✓ **Adoption Laws:** Senate Enrolled Act 140 is a bill

I authored to improve Indiana's adoption laws. In response to four 2009 court decisions, this bill requires a person legally contesting an adoption to file in the same court that is dealing with the adoption. Besides this common-sense change, the bill prohibits anyone convicted of an "attempted" serious felony from adopting.



✓ **VOTING ACCESSIBILITY:** House Enrolled Act

1109 makes voting easier for those with disabilities and military personnel serving our country overseas. The new law ensures disabled voters have the same access to private, independent voting methods when casting ballots early or absentee as they do when voting on Election Day. It also provides online and fax options for military personnel to cast a vote when serving overseas.

✓ **JOB CREATION:** Along with the employer tax cred-

its mentioned on the opposite page, legislators passed other incentives to spur job creation. Small Business Tax Credits will be expanded to make employers with fewer than 35 workers eligible for Economic Development for a Growing Economy credits. A Small Business Ombudsman will advocate with state agencies, navigate regulations, streamline paperwork and monitor burdensome red tape. In addition, the Helping Indiana Re-start Employment initiative will offer tax incentives to employers who hire and train unemployed and underemployed Hoosiers.

✓ **Estates and Trusts:** Most bills are "nuts and bolts" bills which do not garner much media attention,

and Senate Enrolled Act 65 is one of them. A product of the Probate Code Study Commission, which I chair, this bill improves estate administration and strengthens Indiana's laws concerning trusts. It is part of a long-term effort to make our probate, estate and trust statutes among the best in the country.



SEN. JOE ZAKAS

SERVING CITIZENS OF SENATE DISTRICT 11



FOUR LEADING ISSUES RESOLVED BY THE 2010 GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Although 808 bills were filed by state legislators, only 116 passed both houses of the 2010 General Assembly and were sent to the governor. Among those I supported were bills dealing with the four leading issues which emerged during the session: property tax caps, ethics reforms, unemployment insurance and jobs, and education. The latter two bills passed very early Saturday morning, March 13, when the legislature adjourned until it reconvenes in November.

We know that Indiana has been hit hard by the current deep recession. A bill passed in the previous session strengthened our **unemployment insurance** trust fund and made a number of improvements to the system. Premiums paid by thousands of small Indiana businesses were lowered, but larger companies with a greater history of layoffs would incur higher premiums to help cover unemployment insurance benefits. The bill this year delayed the implementation of those premium increases in order to assist larger businesses which are trying to cope with the recession. In addition, the bill includes income tax credits for businesses as an incentive to create new **jobs**.

An **education** bill passed at the end of the session, as well. It would allow public school corporations to use a portion of their fund balances to bolster classroom and operating expenses. This

new flexibility should help schools financially and provide some relief as school administrators work to balance strapped budgets. The bill also requires the Indiana Department of Education to develop a program to improve the reading performance of grade-school students.

Further, a resolution passed both houses of the legislature which will present voters the opportunity in November to decide whether **property tax caps** should be included in our state constitution. Under the proposal, property taxes could not exceed 1 percent of a home's assessed value, 2 percent for residential rental real estate and farms, and 3 percent for business property.

A fourth leading issue which passed involves **ethics reforms** in state government. The bill would prevent legislators from becoming lobbyists for a year after leaving office, increase reporting requirements, and prohibit the governor and other state officials from raising campaign funds during the budget-writing sessions of the legislature, expanding a law which has applied to legislators for many years.

Many other issues were debated throughout the 2010 legislative session, but these four received the most media attention while making positive additions to our laws.

A TRIBUTE TO A HERO

Mishawaka police officer James Szuba and his K-9 partner, Ricky, were killed in January when an impaired driver fleeing police crashed into their squad car.

Senate Enrolled Act 170, which will take effect this year, increases penalties in two scenarios: first, when a law enforcement officer is killed as a result of a perpetrator fleeing police; and second, when a law enforcement ani-

mal is killed by a perpetrator under the influence.

The law should serve as a tribute, to recognize the sacrifice and honor the memory of Officer Szuba and his trained K-9 partner. Going forward, it will recognize members of the law enforcement community and the work they do "to serve and protect" citizens across our state.



Sen. Joe Zakas engages in a floor debate in the Senate chamber with Sen. Lonnie Randolph of East Chicago. Such debates help legislators better understand the content and purpose of bills presented to them.